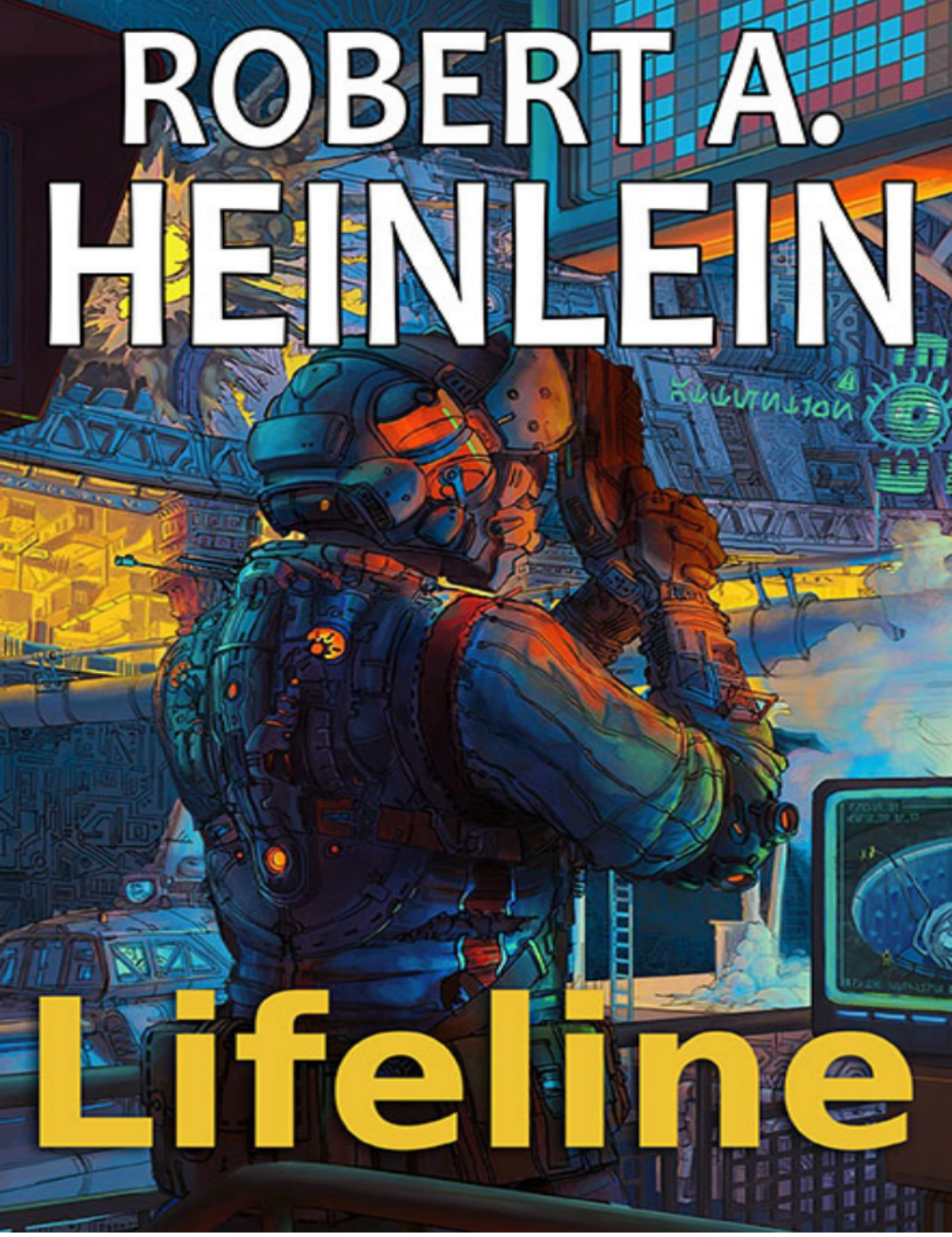
ROBERT A.
HEINLEIN
Lifeline

THE chairman rapped loudly for order. Gradually the catcalls and boos died away as several self-appointed sergeants-at-arms persuaded a few hot-headed individuals to sit down. The speaker on the rostrum by the chairman seemed unaware of the disturbance. His bland, faintly insolent face was impassive. The chairman turned to the speaker, and addressed him, in a voice in which anger and annoyance were barely restrained. "Doctor Pinero," - the "Doctor" was faintly stressed - "I must apologize to you for the unseemly outburst during your remarks. I am surprised that my colleagues should so far forget the dignity proper to men of science as to interrupt a speaker, no matter," he paused and set his mouth, "no matter how great the provocation." Pinero smiled in his face, a smile that was in some way an open insult. The chairman visibly controlled his temper and continued, "I am anxious that the program be concluded decently and in order. I want you to finish your remarks. Nevertheless, I must ask you to refrain from affronting our intelligence with ideas that any educated man knows to be fallacious. Please confine yourself to your discovery - if you have made one." Pinero spread his fat white hands, palms down. "How can I possibly put a new idea into your heads, if I do not first remove your delusions?" The audience stirred and muttered. Someone shouted from the rear of the hail, "Throw the charlatan out! We've had enough." The chairman pounded his gavel. "Gentlemen! Please!" Then to Pinero, "Must I remind you that you are not a member of this body, and that we did not invite you?" Pinero's eyebrows lifted. "So? I seem to remember an invitation on the letterhead of the Academy?" The chairman chewed his lower lip before replying. "True. I wrote that invitation myself. But it was at the request of one of the trustees - a fine public-spirited gentleman, but not a scientist, not a member of the Academy." Pinero smiled his irritating smile. "So? I should have guessed. Old Bidwell, not so, of Amalgamated Life Insurance? And he wanted his trained seals to expose me as a fraud, yes? For if I can tell a man the day of his own death, no one will buy his pretty policies. But how can you expose me, if you will not listen to me first? Even supposing you had the wit to understand me? Bah! He has sent jackals to tear down a lion." He deliberately turned his back on them. The muttering of the crowd swelled and took on a vicious tone. The chairman cried vainly for order. There arose a figure in the front row. "Mister Chairman!" The chairman grasped the opening and shouted, "Gentlemen! Doctor Van RheinSmitt has the floor." The commotion died away. The doctor cleared his throat, smoothed the forelock of his beautiful white hair, and thrust one hand into a side pocket of his smartly tailored trousers.

He assumed his women's club manner. "Mister Chairman, fellow members of the Academy of Science, let us have tolerance. Even a murderer has the right to say his say before the state exacts its tribute. Shall we do less? Even though one may be intellectually certain of the verdict? I grant Doctor Pinero every consideration that should be given by this august body to any unaffiliated colleague, even though" - he bowed slightly in Pinero's direction - "we may not be familiar with the university which bestowed his degree. If what he has to say is false, it can not harm us. If what he has to say is true, we should know it." His mellow cultivated voice rolled on, soothing and calming. "If the eminent doctor's manner appears a trifle in urbane for our tastes, we must bear in mind that the doctor may be from a place, or a stratum, not so meticulous in these little matters. Now our good friend and benefactor has asked us to hear this person and carefully assess the merit of his claims. Let us do so with dignity and decorum." He sat down to a rumble of applause, comfortably aware that he had enhanced his reputation as an intellectual leader. Tomorrow the papers would again mention the good sense and persuasive personality of "America's handsomest University President". Who knew? Perhaps old Bidwell would come through with that swimming pool donation. When the applause had ceased, the chairman turned to where the center of the disturbance sat, hands folded over his little round belly, face serene. "Will you continue, Doctor Pinero?" "Why should I?" The chairman shrugged his shoulders. "You came for that purpose." Pinero arose. "So true. So very true. But was I wise to come? Is there anyone here who has an open mind who can stare a bare fact in the face without blushing? I think not. Even that so beautiful gentleman who asked you to hear me out has already judged me and condemned me. He seeks order, not truth. Suppose truth defies order, will he accept it? Will you? I think not. Still, if I do not speak, you will win your point by default. The little man in the street will think that you little men have exposed me, Pinero, as a hoaxer, a pretender. That does not suit my plans. I will speak." "I will repeat my discovery. In simple language I have invented a technique to tell how long a man will live. I can give you advance billing of the Angel of Death. I can tell you when the Black Camel will kneel at your door. In five minutes time with my apparatus I can tell any of you how many grains of sand are still left in your hourglass." He paused and folded his arms across his chest. For a moment no one spoke. The audience grew restless. Finally the chairman intervened. "You aren't finished, Doctor Pinero?" "What more is there to say?" "You haven't told us how your discovery works." Pinero's eyebrows shot up. "You suggest that I should turn over the fruits of my work for children to play with. This is dangerous knowledge, my friend. I keep it for the man who understands it,

myself." He tapped his chest. "How are we to know that you have anything back of your wild claims?" "So simple. You send a committee to watch me demonstrate. If it works, fine. You admit it and tell the world so. If it does not work, I am discredited, and will apologize. Even I, Pinero, will apologize." A slender stoop-shouldered man stood up in the back of the hail. The chair recognized him and he spoke: "Mr. Chairman, how can the eminent doctor seriously propose such a course? Does he expect us to wait around for twenty or thirty years for some one to die and prove his claims?" Pinero ignored the chair and answered directly: "Pfui! Such nonsense! Are you so ignorant of statistics that you do not know that in any large group there is at least one who will die in the immediate future? I make you a proposition; let me test each one of you in this room and I will name the man who will die within the fortnight, yes, and the day and hour of his death." He glanced fiercely around the room. "Do you accept?" Another figure got to his feet, a portly man who spoke in measured syllables. "I, for one, can not countenance such an experiment. As a medical man, I have noted with sorrow the plain marks of serious heart trouble in many of our elder colleagues. If Doctor Pinero knows those symptoms, as he may, and were he to select as his victim one of their number, the man so selected would be likely to die on schedule, whether the distinguished speaker's mechanical egg-timer works or not." Another speaker backed him up at once. "Doctor Shepard is right. Why should we waste time on voodoo tricks? It is my belief that this person who calls himself Doctor Pinero wants to use this body to give his statements authority. If we participate in this farce, we play into his hands. I don't know what his racket is, but you can bet that he has figured out some way to use us for advertising for his schemes. I move, Mister Chairman, that we proceed with our regular business." The motion carried by acclamation, but Pinero did not sit down. Amidst cries of "Order! Order!" he shook his untidy head at them, and had his say: "Barbarians! Imbeciles! Stupid dolts! Your kind have blocked the recognition of every great discovery since time began. Such ignorant canaille are enough to start Galileo spinning in his grave. That fat fool down there twiddling his elk's, tooth calls himself a medical man. Witch doctor would be a better term! That little baldheaded runt over there - You! You style yourself a philosopher, and prate about life and time in your neat categories. What do you know of either one? How can you ever learn when you won't examine the truth when you have a chance? Bah!" He spat upon the stage. "You call this an Academy of Science. I call it an undertaker's convention, interested only in embalming the ideas of your red-blooded predecessors." He paused for breath and was grasped on each side by two members of the platform committee and rushed out the wings.

Several reporters arose hastily from the press table and followed him. The chairman declared the meeting adjourned. The newspapermen caught up with him as he was going out by the stage door. He walked with a light springy step, and whistled a little tune. There was no trace of the belligerence he had shown a moment before. They crowded about him. "How about an interview, doe?" "What dyu think of Modem Education?" "You certainly told 'em. What are your views on Life after Death?" "Take off your hat, doe, and look at the birdie." He grinned at them all. "One at a time, boys, and not so fast. I used to be a newspaperman myself. How about coming up to my place, and we'll talk about it?" A few minutes later they were trying to find places to sit down in Pinero's messy bed-living-room, and lighting his cigars. Pinero looked around and beamed. "What'll it be, boys? Scotch, or Bourbon?" When that was taken care of he got down to business. "Now, boys, what do you want to know?" "Lay it on the line, doe. Have you got something, or haven't you?" "Most assuredly I have something, my young friend." "Then tell us how it works. That guff you handed the profs won't get you anywhere now." "Please, my dear fellow. it is my invention. I expect to make some money with it. Would you have me give it away to the first person who asks for it?" "See here, doe, you've got to give us something if you expect to get a break in the morning papers. What do you use? A crystal ball?" "No, not quite. Would you like to see my apparatus?" "Sure. Now we are getting somewhere." He ushered them into an adjoining room, and waved his hand. "There it is, boys." The mass of equipment that met their eyes vaguely resembled a medico's office x-ray gear. Beyond the obvious fact that it used electrical power, and that some of the dials were calibrated in familiar terms, a casual inspection gave no clue to its actual use. "What's the principle, doe?" Pinero pursed his lips and considered. "No doubt you are all familiar with the truism that life is electrical in nature? Well, that truism isn't worth a damn, but it will help to give you an idea of the principle. You have also been told that time is a fourth dimension. Maybe you believe it, perhaps not. It has been said so many times that it has ceased to have any meaning. It is simply a clich&#65533;hat windbags use to impress fools. But I want you to try to visualize it now and try to feel it emotionally." He stepped up to one of the reporters. "Suppose we, take you as an example. Your name is Rogers, is it not? Very well, Rogers, you are a space-time event having duration four ways. You are not quite six feet tall, you are about twenty inches wide and perhaps ten inches thick. In time, there stretches behind you more of this space-time event reaching to perhaps nineteen-sixteen, of which we see a cross-section here at right angles to the time axis, and as thick as the present. At the far end is a baby, smelling of sour milk and drooling its breakfast on its bib. At the

other end lies, perhaps, an old man someplace in the nineteen-eighties. Imagine this space-time event which we call Rogers as a long pink worm, continuous through the years, one end at his mother's womb, the other at the grave. It stretches past us here and the cross-section we see appears as a single discrete body. But that is illusion. There is physical continuity to this pink worm, enduring through the years. As a matter of fact there is physical continuity in, this concept to the entire race, for these pink worms branch off from other pink worms. In this fashion the race is like a vine whose branches intertwine and send Out shoots. Only by taking a cross-section of the vine would we fall into the error of believing that the shootlets were discrete individuals." He paused and looked around at their faces. One of them, a dour hard-bitten chap, put in a word. "That's all very pretty, Pinero; if true, but where does that get you?" Pinero favored him with an unresentful smile. "Patience, my friend. I asked you to think of life as electrical. Now think of our long pink worm as a conductor of electricity. You have heard, perhaps, of the fact that electrical engineers can, by certain measurements, predict the exact location of a break in a trans-Atlantic cable without ever leaving the shore. I do the same with our pink worms. By applying my instruments to the cross-section here in this room I can tell where the break occurs, that is to say, when death takes place. Or, if you like, I can reverse the connections and tell you the date of your birth. But that is uninteresting; you already know it." The dour individual sneered. "I've caught you, doe. If what you said about the race being like a vine of pink worms is true, you can't tell birthdays because the connection with the race is continuous at birth. Your electrical. conductor reaches on back through the mother into a man's remotest ancestors." Pinero beamed, "True, and clever, my friend. But you have pushed the analogy too far. It is not done in the precise manner in which one measures the length of an electrical conductor. In some ways it is more like measuring the length of a long corridor by bouncing an echo off the far end. At birth there is a sort of twist in the corridor, and, by proper calibration, I can detect the echo from that twist. There is just one case in which I can get no determinant reading; when a woman is actually carrying a child, I can't sort out her life-line from that of the unborn infant." "Let's see you prove it." "Certainly, my dear friend. Will you be a subject?" One of the others spoke up. "He's called your bluff, Luke. Put up, or shut up." "I'm game. What do I do?" "First write the date of your birth on a sheet of paper, and hand it to one of your colleagues." Luke complied. "Now what?" "Remove your outer clothing and step upon these scales. Now tell me, were you ever very much thinner, or very much fatter, than you are now. No? What did you weigh at birth? Ten pounds? A fine bouncing baby boy. They don't

come so big any more." "What is all this flubdubbery?" "I am trying to approximate the average cross-section of our long pink conductor, my dear Luke. Now will you seat yourself here. Then place this electrode in your mouth. No, it will not hurt you; the voltage is quite low, less than one micro-volt, but I must have a good connection." The doctor left him and went behind his apparatus, where he lowered a hood over his head before touching his controls. Some of the exposed dials came to life and a low humming came from the machine. It stopped and the doctor popped out of his little hide-away. "I get sometime in February, nineteen-twelve. Who has the piece of paper with the date?" It was produced and unfolded. The custodian read, "February 22nd, 1912." The stillness that followed was broken by a voice from the edge of the little group. "Doe, can I have another drink?" The tension relaxed, and several spoke at once, "Try it on me, doe." "Me first, doe, I'm an orphan and really want to know." "How about it, doe. Give us all a little loose play." He smilingly complied, ducking in and out of the hood like a gopher from its hole. When they all had twin slips of paper to prove the doctor's skill, Luke broke a long silence. "How about showing how you predict death, Pinero." "If you wish. Who will try it?" No one answered. Several of them nudged Luke forward. "Go ahead, smart guy. You asked for it." He allowed himself to be seated in the chair. Pinero changed some of the switches, then entered the hood. When the humming ceased, he came out, rubbing his hands briskly together. "Well, that's all there is to see, boys. Got enough for a story?" "Hey, what about the prediction? When does Luke get his 'thirty'?" Luke faced him. "Yes, how about it? What's your answer?" Pinero looked pained. "Gentlemen, I am surprised at you. I give that information for a fee. Besides, it is a professional confidence. I never tell anyone but the client who consults me." "I don't mind. Go ahead and tell them." "I am very sorry. I really must refuse. I agreed only to show you how, not to give the results." Luke ground the butt of his cigarette into the floor. "It's a hoax, boys. He probably looked up the age of every reporter in town just to be ready to pull this. It won't wash, Pinero." Pinero gazed at him sadly. "Are you married, my friend?" "Do you have any one dependent on you? Any close relatives?" "No. WHY, do you want to adopt me?" Pinero shook his head sadly. "I am very sorry for you, my dear Luke. You will die before tomorrow."

"SCIENCE MEET ENDS IN RIOT" "SAVANTS SAPS SAYS SEER" "DEATH PUNCHES TIMECLOCK" "SCRIBE DIES PER DOC'S DOPE" "HOAX' CLAIMS SCIENCE HEAD"

"... within twenty minutes of Pinero's strange prediction, Timons was struck by a falling sign while walking down Broadway toward the

offices of the Daily Herald where he was employed. "Doctor Pinero declined to comment but confirmed the story that he had predicted Timons' death by means of his so-called chronovitameter. Chief of Police Roy..."

Does the FUTURE worry You???????? Don't waste money on fortune tellers - Consult Doctor Hugo Pinero, Bio-Consultant to help you plan for the future by infallible scientific methods. No Hocus-Pocus. No "Spirit" Messages. $10,000 Bond posted in forfeit to back our predictions. Circular on request. SANDS of TIME, Inc. Majestic Bldg., Suite 700 (adv.)

- Legal Notice To whom it may concern, greetings; I, John Cabot Winthrop III, of the firm Winthrop, Winthrop, Ditmars & Winthrop, Attorneys-at-Law, do affirm that Hugo Pinero of this city did hand to me ten thousand dollars in lawful money of the United States, and instruct me to place it in escrow with a chartered bank of my selection with escrow instructions as follows:. The entire bond shall be forfeit, and shall forthwith be paid to the first client of Hugo Pinero and/or Sands of Time, Inc. who shall exceed his life tenure as predicted by Hugo Pinero by one per centurn, or to the estate of the first client who shall fail of such predicted tenure in a like amount, whichever occurs first in point of time. I do further affirm that I have this day placed this bond in escrow with the above related instructions with the Equitable-First National Bank of this city. Subscribed--and sworn, John Cabot Winthrop Ill

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 2nd day of April, 1951. Albert M. Swanson Notary Public in and for this county and state My commission expires June 17, 1951.

"Good evening Mr. and Mrs. Radio Audience, let's go to Press! Flash! Hugo Pinero, The Miracle Man from Nowhere, has made his thousandth death prediction without a claimant for the reward he posted for anyone who catches him failing to call the turn. With thirteen of his clients already dead it is mathematically certain that - he has a private line to the main office of the Old Man with the Scythe. That is one piece of news I don't want to know before it happens. Your Coast-to-Coast Correspondent will not be a client of Prophet Pinero. . ." The judge's watery baritone cut through the stale air of the courtroom. "Please, Mr. Weeds, let us return to our muttons. This court granted your prayer for a temporary restraining order, and now you ask that it be made permanent. In rebuttal, Mr. Pinero claims that you have presented no cause and asks that the injunction be lifted, and that I order your client to cease from attempts to interfere

with what Pinero describes as a simple - lawful business. As you are not addressing a jury, please omit the rhetoric and tell me in plain language why I should not grant his prayer." Mr. Weeds jerked his chin nervously, making his flabby Grey dewlap drag across his high stiff collar, and resumed: "May it please the honorable court, I represent the public-" "Just a moment. I thought you were appearing for Amalgamated Life Insurance." "I am, Your Honor, in a formal sense. In a wider sense I represent several other major assurance, fiduciary, and financial institutions; their stockholders, and policy holders, who constitute a majority of the citizenry. In addition we feel that we protect the interests of the entire population; unorganized, inarticulate, and otherwise unprotected." "I thought that I represented the public," observed the judge dryly. "I am afraid I must regard you as appearing for your client-of-record. But continue; what is your thesis?" The elderly barrister attempted to swallow his Adam's apple, then began again. "Your Honor, we contend that there are two separate reasons why this injunction should be made permanent, and, further, that each reason is sufficient alone. In the first place, this person is engaged in the practice of soothsaying, an occupation proscribed both in common law and statute. He is a common fortune teller, a vagabond charlatan who preys on the gullibility of the public. He is cleverer than the ordinary gypsy palm-reader, astrologer, or table tipper, and to the same extent more dangerous. He makes false claims of modern scientific methods to give a spurious dignity to his thaumaturgy. We have here in court leading representatives of the Academy of Science to give expert witness as to the absurdity of his claims. "In the second place, even if this person's claims were true-granting for the sake of argument such an absurdity" - Mr. Weems permitted himself a thin-lipped smile - "we contend that his activities are contrary to the public interest in general, and unlawfully injurious to the interests of my client in particular. We are prepared to produce numerous exhibits with the legal custodians to prove that this person did publish, or cause to have published, utterances urging the public to dispense with the priceless boon of life insurance to the great detriment of their welfare and to the financial damage of my client." Pinero arose in his place. "Your Honor, may I say a few words?" "What is it?" "I believe I can simplify the situation if permitted to make a brief analysis." "Your Honor," cut in Weems, "this is most irregular." "Patience, Mr. Weems. Your interests will be protected. It seems to me that we need more light and less noise in this matter. If Dr. Pinero can shorten the proceedings by speaking at this time, I am inclined to let him. Proceed, Dr. Pinero." "Thank you, Your Honor. Taking the last of Mr. Weems' points first, I am prepared to stipulate that I published the utterances he speaks of" "One moment, Doctor. You have chosen to act

as your own attorney. Are you sure you are competent to protect your own interests?" "I am prepared to chance it, Your Honor. Our friends here can easily prove what I stipulate." "Very well. You may proceed." "I will stipulate that many persons have cancelled life insurance policies as a result thereof, but I challenge them to show that anyone so doing has suffered any loss or damage there from. It is true that the Amalgamated has lost business through my activities, but that is the natural result of my discovery, which has made their policies as obsolete as the bow and arrow. If an injunction is granted on that ground, I shall set up a coal oil lamp factory, then ask for an injunction against the Edison and General Electric companies to forbid them to manufacture incandescent bulbs." "I will stipulate that I am engaged in the business of making predictions of death, but I deny that I am practicing magic, black, white, or rainbow colored. If to make predictions by methods of scientific accuracy is illegal, then the actuaries of the Amalgamated have been guilty for years in that they predict the exact percentage that will die each year in any given large group. I predict death retail; the Amalgamated predicts it wholesale. If their actions are legal, how can mine be illegal?" "I admit that it makes a difference whether I can do what I claim, or not; and I will stipulate that the so-called expert witnesses from the Academy of Science will testify that I cannot. But they know nothing of my method and cannot give truly expert testimony on it." "Just a moment, Doctor. Mr. Weems, is it true that your expert witnesses are not conversant with Dr. Pinero's theory and methods?" Mr. Weems looked worried. He drummed on the table top, then answered, "Will the Court grant me a few moments indulgence?" "Certainly." Mr. Weems held a hurried whispered consultation with his cohorts, then faced the bench. "We have a procedure to suggest, Your Honor. If Dr. Pinero will take the stand and explain the theory and practice of his alleged method, then these distinguished scientists will be able to advise the Court as to the validity of his claims." The judge looked inquiringly at Pinero, who responded, "I will not willingly agree to that. Whether my process is true or false, it would be dangerous to let it fall into the hands of fools and quacks" he waved his hand at the group of professors seated in the front row, paused and smiled maliciously "as these gentlemen know quite well. Furthermore it is not necessary to know the process in order to prove that it will work. Is it necessary to understand the complex miracle of biological reproduction in order to observe that a hen lays eggs? Is it necessary for me to reeducate this entire body of self-appointed custodians of wisdom - cure them of their ingrown superstitions - in order to prove that my predictions are correct? There are but two ways of forming an opinion in science. One is the scientific method; the other, the scholastic. One can judge from

experiment, or one can blindly accept authority. To the scientific mind, experimental proof is all important and theory is merely a convenience in description, to be junked when it no longer fits. To the academic mind, authority is everything and facts are junked when they do not fit theory laid down by authority." "It is this point of view-academic minds clinging like oysters to disproved theories-that has blocked every advance of knowledge in history. I am prepared to prove my method by experiment, and, like Galileo in another court, I insist, 'It still moves!'" "Once before I offered such proof to this same body of self-styled experts, and they rejected it. I renew my offer; let me measure the life lengths of the members of the Academy of Science. Let them appoint a committee to judge the results. I will seal my findings in two sets of envelopes; on the outside of each envelope in one set will appear the name of a member, on the inside the date of his death. In the other envelopes I will place names, on the outside I will place dates. Let the committee place the envelopes in a vault, then meet from time to time to open the appropriate envelopes. In such a large body of men some deaths may be expected, if Amalgamated actuaries can be trusted, every week or two. In such a fashion they will accumulate data very rapidly to prove that Pinero is a liar, or no." He stopped, and pushed out his little chest until it almost caught up with his little round belly. He glared at the sweating savants. "Well?" The judge raised his eyebrows, and caught Mr. Weems' eye. "Do you accept?" "Your Honor, I think the proposal highly improper-" The judge cut him short. "I warn you that I shall rule against you if you do not accept, or propose an equally reasonable method of arriving at the truth." Weems opened his mouth, changed his mind, looked up and down the faces of learned witnesses, and faced the bench. "We accept, Your Honor." "Very well. Arrange the details between you. The temporary injunction is lifted, and Dr. Pinero must not be molested in the pursuit of his business. Decision on the petition for permanent injunction is reserved without prejudice pending the accumulation of evidence. Before we leave this matter I wish to comment on the theory implied by you, Mr. Weems, when you claimed damage to your client. There has grown up in the minds of certain groups in this country the notion that because a man or corporation has made a profit out of the public for a number of years, the government and the courts are charged with the duty of guaranteeing such profit in the future, even in the face of changing circumstances and contrary public interest. This strange doctrine is not supported by statute nor common law. Neither individuals nor corporations have any right to come into court and ask that the clock of history be stopped, or turned back, for their private benefit. That is all." Bidwell grunted in annoyance. "Weems, if you can't think up

anything better than that, Amalgamated is going to need a new chief attorney. It's been ten weeks since you lost the injunction, and that little wart is coining money hand over fist. Meantime every insurance firm in the country is going broke. Hoskins, what's our loss ratio?" "It's hard to say, Mr. Bidwell. It gets worse every day. We've paid off thirteen big policies this week; all of them taken out since Pinero started operations." A spare little man spoke up. "I say, Bidwell, we aren't accepting any new applications for United until we have time to check and be sure that they have not consulted Pinero. Can't we afford to wait until the scientists show him up?" Bidwell snorted. "You blasted optimist! They won't show him up. Aldrich, can't you face a fact? The fat little blister has got something; how I don't know. This is a fight to the finish. If we wait, we're licked." He threw his cigar into a cuspidor, and bit savagely into a fresh one. "Clear out of here, all of you! I'll handle this my own way. You too, Aldrich. United may wait, but Amalgamated won't." Weems cleared his throat apprehensively. "Mr. Bidwell, I trust you will consult with me before embarking on any major change in policy?" Bidwell grunted. They filed out. When they were all gone and the door closed, Bidwell snapped the switch of the inter-office announcer. "O.K.; send him in." The outer door opened; a slight dapper figure stood for a moment at the threshold. His small dark eyes glanced quickly about the room before he entered, then he moved up to Bidwell with a quick soft tread. He spoke to Bidwell in a flat emotionless voice. His face remained impassive except for the live animal eyes. "You wanted to talk to me?" "Yes." "What's the proposition?" "Sit down, and we'll talk." Pinero met the young couple at the door of his inner office. "Come in, my dears, come in. Sit down. Make yourselves at home. Now tell me, what do you want of Pinero? Surely such young people are not anxious about the final roll call?" The boy's honest young face showed slight confusion. "Well, you see, Dr. Pinero, I'm Ed Harley and this is my wife, Betty. We're going to have-that is, Betty is expecting a baby and, well-" Pinero smiled benignly. "I understand. You want to know how long you will live in order to make the best possible provision for the youngster. Quite wise. Do you both want readings, or just yourself?" The girl answered, "Both of us, we think." Pinero beamed at her. "Quite so. I agree. Your reading presents certain technical difficulties at this time, but I can give you some information now, and more later after your baby arrives. Now come into my laboratory, my dears, and we'll commence." He rang for their case histories, then showed them into his workshop. "Mrs. Harley first, please. If you will go behind that screen and remove your shoes and your outer clothing, please. Remember, I am an old man, whom you are consulting as you would a physician." He turned away and made some minor adjustments of his

apparatus. Ed nodded to his wife who slipped behind the screen and reappeared almost at once, clothed in two wisps of silk. Pinero glanced up, noted her fresh young prettiness and her touching shyness. "This way, my dear. First we must weigh you. There. Now take your place on the stand. This electrode in your mouth. No, Ed, you mustn't touch her while she is in the circuit. It won't take a minute. Remain quiet." He dove under the machine's hood and the dials sprang into life. Very shortly he came out with a perturbed look on his face. "Ed, did you touch her?" "No, Doctor." Pinero ducked back again, remained a little longer. When he came out this time, he told the girl to get down and dress. He turned to her husband. "Ed, make yourself ready." "What's Betty's reading, Doctor?" "There is a little difficulty. I want to test you first." When he came out from taking the youth's reading, his face was more troubled than ever. Ed inquired as to his trouble. Pinero shrugged his shoulders, and brought a smile to his lips. "Nothing to concern you, my boy. A little mechanical misadjustment, I think. But I shan't be able to give you two your readings today. I shall need to overhaul my machine. Can you come back tomorrow?" "Why, I think so. Say, I'm sorry about your machine. I hope it isn't serious." "It isn't, I'm sure. Will you come back into my office, and visit for a bit?" "Thank you, Doctor. You are very kind." "But Ed, I've got to meet Ellen." Pinero turned the full force of his personality on her. "Won't you grant me a few moments, my dear young lady? I am old and like the sparkle of young folk's company. I get very little of it. Please." He nudged them gently into his office, and seated them. Then he ordered lemonade and cookies sent in, offered them cigarettes, and lit a cigar. Forty minutes later Ed listened entranced, while Betty was quite evidently acutely nervous and anxious to leave, as the doctor spun out a story concerning his adventures as a young man in Tierra del Fuego. When the doctor stopped to relight his cigar, she stood up. "Doctor, - we really must leave. Couldn't we hear the rest tomorrow?" "Tomorrow? There will not be time tomorrow." "But you haven't time today either. Your secretary has rung five times." "Couldn't you spare me just a few more minutes?" "I really can't today, doctor. I have an appointment. There is someone waiting for me." "There is no way to induce you?" "I'm afraid not. Come, Ed." After they had gone, the doctor stepped to the window and stared out over the city. Presently he picked out two tiny figures as they left the office building. He watched them hurry to the corner, wait for the lights to change, then start across the street. When they were part way across, there came the scream of a siren. The two little figures hesitated, started back, stopped, and turned. Then the car was upon them. As the car slammed to a stop, they showed up from beneath it, no longer two figures, but simply a limp unorganized heap

of clothing. Presently the doctor turned away - from the window. Then he picked up his phone, and spoke to his secretary. "Cancel my appointments for the rest of the day.... No... No one... I don't care; cancel them." Then he sat down in his chair. His cigar went out. Long after dark he held it, still unlighted.

Pinero sat down at his dining table and contemplated the gourmet's luncheon spread before him. He had ordered this meal with particular care, and had come home a little early in order to enjoy it fully. Somewhat later he let a few drops of fiori d'Alpini roll around his tongue and trickle down his throat. The heavy fragrant syrup warmed his mouth, and reminded him of the little mountain flowers for which it was named. He sighed. It - had been a good meal, an exquisite meal and had justified the exotic liqueur. His musing was interrupted by a disturbance at the front door. The voice of his elderly maidservant was raised in remonstrance. A heavy male voice interrupted her. The commotion moved down the hail and the dining room door was pushed open. "Madonna! Non si puo entrare! The Master is eating!" "Never mind, - Angela. I have time to see these gentlemen. You ..may go." Pinero faced the surly-faced spokesman of the intruders. "You have business with me; yes?" "You bet we have. Decent people have had enough of your damned nonsense." "And so?" The caller did not answer at once. A smaller dapper individual moved out from behind him and faced Pinero.

"We might as well begin." The chairman of the committee placed a key in the lock-box and opened it. "Wenzell, will you help me pick out today's envelopes?" He was interrupted by a touch on his arm. - "Dr. Baird, you are wanted on the telephone." "Very well. Bring the instrument here." When it was fetched he placed the receiver to his ear. "Hello.... Yes; speaking.... What? .. No, we have beard nothing... Destroyed the machine, you say.... Dead! How?.... No! No statement. None at all.... Call me later...." He slammed the instrument down - and pushed it from him. "What's up? Who's dead now?" Baird held up one hand. "Quiet, gentlemen, please! Pinero was murdered a few moments ago at his home." "Murdered?!" "That isn't all. About the same time vandals broke into his office and smashed his apparatus." - No one spoke at first. The committee members glanced around at each other. No one seemed anxious to be the first to comment. Finally one spoke up. "Get it out." "Get what out?" "Pinero's envelope. It's in there too. I've seen it." Baird located it and slowly tore it open. He unfolded the single sheet of paper, and scanned it. "Well? Out with it!" "One thirteen p.m. - today." They took this in silence. Their dynamic calm was broken by a member across the table from Baird reaching for the lock-box. Baud interposed a hand. "What do you want?" "My

prediction-it's in there-we're all in there." "Yes, yes. We're all in here. Let's have them." Baird placed both hands over the box. He held the eye of the man opposite him but did not speak. He licked his lips. The corner of his mouth twitched. His hands shook. Still he did not speak. The man opposite relaxed back into his chair. "You're right, of course," he said. "Bring me that waste basket." Baird's voice was low and strained but steady. He accepted it and dumped the litter on the rug. He placed the tin basket on the table before him. He tore half a dozen envelopes across, set a match to them, and dropped them in the basket. Then he started tearing a double handful at a time, and fed the fire steadily. The smoke made him cough, and tears ran out of his smarting eyes. Someone got up and opened a window. When he was through, he pushed the basket away from him, looked down, and spoke. "I'm afraid I've ruined this table top."